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WILLOW POLLEN

BY

JEANNETTE MARKS

THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY
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TO

THE MEMORY OF

MY MOTHER

JEANNETTE HOLMES COLWELL MARKS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Fleur de Lys
September 27, 1920.

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WILLOW POLLEN

PROEM

Beautiful she was to look upon
And beautiful to know,
And all who knew her loved her.
There was none to whom she was not tender,
Compassionate in her word or her silence;
There was none of whom she did not think well.

In a quiet room, my head upon her breast,
Often have I heard her heart beat,
Often have I listened to the voice of her heart,
And its speech was the speech of many sorrows.
But of her own sorrows she spoke not;
She spoke only of the grief that came to her for healing;
And her speech was silence,
Murmur of wind,
Mute spaces of sky,—
These were her caresses and her healing,
And with silence and wind and sky she is now one,—
Not separate.

She is gone.
Remember her if you will!
For me she is still everywhere
And never to be forgotten!
Out of the dawn
The fringed lashes of blue gentians widen to her eyes;
Through the hot day
The shadow of her presence revolves upon me

As the cool finger on the sun dial;
In the afternoon
Shaken light burns in the memory of her hair;
And at evening
All my thoughts go fluttering, gray-winged, after her,
Till she gathers them in to the nest of her silence
And I am come back to my Mother
And to sleep.

WILLOW POLLEN

Fleur de Lys on Lake Champlain, June 3, 1920

The rain upon my roof is the rain of apple blossoms,
At my feet the water willows stand knee-deep in
rushes;
A swaying mirror for the sun the lake swings and tips,
Spilling broken drowsy shadows and silver leaves.
In the willow pollen the bees hum;
In the apple bloom the bees hum;
Fluttering up like a begging hand
The ash tree twirls its mystic seven-fold leaf,
The thrush its song.

O beautiful world, what are you?
And who made you?
Are you no more than a fragrant dream,
A jewelled crust of loam for sun to shine upon,
A swaying mirror,
Willow pollen,
A twirling song,
A crumbling leaf?

YOU

I

You are the sunshine,
I am the sod:
Flame to my leaf-mould,
And goldenrod.

II

You are the shadow,
I am the rock:
Coolness of sheep bells,
Stilling the flock.

III

You are the starlight,
I am the stream:
Trees dripping lustre
Into our dream.

CROSS ROADS

I wonder if the wildrose knows I love you,—
All the festivals of spring your name has lain
Now a petal on my bosom, now a leaf against my lip
In the rain?

I wonder if the wood thrush knows I love you,—
Every step a song, every song a flight home to you
While the path runs on through twilight and the night wheels back to day
And I pray?

I wonder if the heavens know I love you,—
Dusky night-time cupped with stars, lily day immaculate
Leading on unto the cross roads where you and I
Say goodbye?

CALENDAR

Of a Little Garden on Lake Champlain

Sometimes the sun, like a big bee
Choosing the flowers he will bring to bloom,
Dreams over my garden,
So still the dust shines on his burning wings.
And sometimes he swings away towards the evening
star
To fill his basket claws with night.
Come morning he sprinkles darkness with his gold,
Rubs legs together—I saw him do it—
And there's a purple larkspur tapering into rose
And blood-red columbine,—
It's July then.
Or the big bee finds a flaming dawn,
Scours it with pollen from his back
And there's a poppy's glossy wrinkled cup,—
Then it's June.

At times he scoops the white crest off a wave
Into the basket of his claws—
I've seen the big bee skip upon the lake for joy—
Then zi-ig! He's back again
Spreading some lilies by the sandy path,
White with gold dashed on their lips
Where he clings—the big bee—sucking.
I know he's there because the bells ring so:
Seven lilies, then five, then four,
I count them on their stems,

An octave's length of melody,
A little running song of happiness,—
It's August then.

But now he's quiet.
Some waste of gold in autumn leaves and fields,
And gold upon the lake—pale leaf of drifting waters
Cut by the wild duck's close, sharp flight—frets him.
For he must store in steep sky granaries much bannered gold
With which to hang a hundred winter dawns and dusks.
Still, he spares a little for my garden's need,
Spreading it in marigolds and frost,—
It is September then,—October, too.

The bee, the big bee, the burning bee
Begins and ends in gold.
In spring, knocking the snow from rosy apple bloom,
He climbs the sky with fagots on his back
To scatter them in yellow willow twigs and daffodils;
And when he leaves my garden for his sleep,
Flings daffodils along an evening sky,—
It's May then, and April, too.

Some say there are no sky daffodils and no big bee.
Pooh! I say the sun is a bee, a big bee, a burning bee,
And bears the whole world's wealth upon his back.
What if he is a ruby humming bird betimes
Or a saffron butterfly
Or a gray-hooded moth at dusk!

I've seen him when he was an emerald dragon fly
About my little garden's pool,
But not for long.
He has his mysteries.
His winter's cell of silver white has neither rose nor red nor gold.
Who would not like the change? . . .
I say the sun is a bee, a big bee, a burning bee,
I *know!*

WILD GRAPE VINE

I will be like a wild grape vine,
I will climb the sun gathering color;
Until every leaf of my being is fluted with rose,
Cupped in brown-gold,
Dusted with silver.
I will cling with my dry stem
Until my stem is strong as brown cedar.
Then will I swing from tree to tree,
Twisting, turning, blowing,
Binding all trees with my tendrils,
Embracing them, leaping with them,
Woven in and out of them,
One!

And the wild bee shall love me,
And the wild bee shall follow me
With song!
And I shall be mad fragrance at dusk
And sweet odor at dawn.
And then!—And then
Among all beloved trees which can resist me!
They will yield themselves to me
And I shall swing over the whole world,—
Every forest of earth,
Every dim place, withdrawn, silent,
Every wilderness,—
Spanning the sky with a vast arch of rose,
Beating upon the stars with my gold,
Kissing the dawn with my silver,

Resting in my brown upon earth,
My roots in her, my fruit her being!

Wind, Wind,
Then will the mad fragrance of my breath be your breath,—
The wild bee clinging!
Wind, Wind,
Then will my hard dry stem know the flight of bird,—
The wild bee following!
Wind, Wind,
Then will my love know the flutter of soft leaf upon me,—
The wild bee singing!

TO SOME FLOWERS

Growing Near a Wall of Portland Harbor

What will you bring today?
Nod once if it be grave,
Nod thrice if it be gay!

Primrose with eyes for night,
Sweet-peas with wings for flight,
Poppies with cups for dew,
Love in the midst of rue:
Which nods to me?

No, you turn your faces all one way
Against the wall,
Because a wind from off the sea
Draws its chill fingers down your cups
And bids your petals fall.

You do not nod,
You beckon neither once nor thrice
To me, but to the earth
There slips a cover manifold
Of every hue.

And from the wall beside the sea
Curl mist and myriad broken wings.

Such gift you give to me!

STARS

I

When joys were vivid I did sit
Within a golden field,
And there I pulled the whitest stars
Green earth can yield.

II

For Bethlehem those stars were named,
The Lord Christ sat with me;
And I was little and I leaned
Upon His knee.

III

Now I am old and joys are gone,
Christ in this room I find
Who brings from distant Bethlehem
Stars for His blind.

GREEN GOLDEN DOOR

Green golden door, swing in, swing in!
  Fanning the life a man must live,
  Echoes and airs and minstrelsies,
  Love and hope that he calleth his,
  Fear and hurt and a man's own sin
  Casting them forth and sucking them in,
Green golden door, swing out, swing out!

Green golden door, swing in, swing in!
  Show me the youth that will not die,
  Tell me the dream that has not waked,
  Seek me the heart that never ached,
  Speak me the truth men will not doubt!
Green golden door, swing out, swing out!

Green golden door, swing in, swing out!
  Long is the wailing of man's breath,
  Short is the wail of death.

BREAD

I

Dear and Unknown,
So you shower white porcelain with roses for me,
Red roses, white roses, roses of rose,
Clipping their stems,
Spreading them out in the bowl
Till the green leaves net the white water with silver,
Glisten with light,
Stir with the stir of their pattern of leaves,
With the breath of their draught of cool water,
With the bloom of rose petals crisp in the peace of
white water,
Safe in the shadow of night,
Tasting the gift of new life.

II

Once beauty was bread unto me.
But now I am gone, rob none for my bread.
God gave me a soul no rose, red or white, ever equalled.
Did God give me love?
What doubling of petals has ever brought grief?
What leaf?
In what garden is life crushed always to dreams?
Oh, now, what are roses to me,
Red roses, white roses and roses of rose?
Does God give the roses a soul for their flight?
What petals blow on this journey I go?

III

Dear, my Unknown,
Put no rose to my lips cold in this porcelain bowl of
myself!
Roses, red roses, white roses, roses of rose,
Once bread unto me;
Rain them on pulses that beat,
Toss them to hands which are quick to their bloom;
Give them, I beg you, to one who can see;
Feed them, I pray you,—
Roses, red roses, white roses, roses of rose,—
To men who still hunger for bread!

OBSCURITY

I

Someday I shall be a leaf
A shining green leaf, fan-folded,
One of many opening in a sunlit wind;
Or I shall be a bit of bark,
Say on the Poverty Birch—
Since I am obscure and poor and short of life
And my work of no account to commerce—,
And I shall flutter there in the wind,
My bit of sooty white rind speckled red and gold like trout skin
And cross-hatched with lines of color;
Or—but I do not know what I shall be
And it does not matter.
God has made so much that alters beautiful:
The jigging shadows of trees
Through which thoughts pass to that which does not change;
The wind that tramps eternity;
The very lava of this universe He turns to frost;
Like frost He throws white fingers up out of loam
And tosses into space the spinning stars.

II

I wonder whether ragged autumn leaves feel ill clad
Remembering their soft dress in spring?
Or whether autumn browns seem dreary to the leaves and grass?

And growing older makes cedars shabby at the stem?
I hear the hard, dry clatter of some dead oak leaves,—
They sound so strong for any wind.
But sometimes when I am tired my dress makes me
ashamed
And I am awkward and ill at ease—
Clothes have a way of telling stories
Even as the bark of trees will tell
Which way the storm winds blow—
I remember when I was young
And scarcely knew that money paid for clothes,
My garments were fresh and silken like poplar leaves
And there were more than I needed;
And my hair was soft and thick,
With gold always in it as in the larch in early spring;
And my body was lithe and vigorous;
When I was tired it was the quick dip of the sapling
in the storm,
The least clearing wind set me free again
And I stood straight with all my quivering aspen leaves
Shaking the sunlight into dance.

III

Now I lie awake at night, many nights,
Sometimes when I am ill,
Sometimes when I am well,
And think about money and rents in worn clothes
And feel the hunger of old women and backyard cats
As if it were my own hunger;

And the wind noses about for crumbs in a bit of newspaper
And flaps tattered dirty shawls over me,
And my thoughts are bent and old
And I shiver in the dark trying to bless God.
I wonder why God gives Himself to trees
And lets old women starve?
And backyard cats nose for crumbs in a piece of newspaper?
And why certain rich people are as well varnished against cold
As fat beech buds against the frost?
Do you suppose God is a Merchant
And sells this warm lustre from the stars—
Stars hung like bright drops of water in a big night wind—
And plans to make a profit from the rich? . . .
I am not an anarchist
Except in stars.

IV

When the dawn comes it brings the crows.
Caw! Caw! Caw! The crows!
The crow sleeps east but west he blows
To pick some carrion that he knows
Caw! Caw! Caw! It blows!

V

I travel East to meet the sun
With a gray heron battling up against the wind,

Above the nests that knew the ravens in their sleep,
Above the trees that toss the light,
Above the rocks that blossom into rose,
On towards the sun!
It does not matter now how I am clothed;
For my mind glitters with a thousand thoughts,
Star-sown, moon-shaped, sun-colored,
Amber-shining like polished foliage in a great dawn
wind,
And the lustre on the heron's breast
Is now God and now the Morning Star:
I travel East to meet the sun!

BROWN MOTHER

Brown Mother, Earth Mother, my love does it stir,
is it living?
Is this seed-time in darkness? It is bleak, and the
rain
Drums hard on this silence, makes heavy my pain.
I am blind yet the wind does search me like eyes that
are old.
O, my Mother, sweet Mother, through the lengthening
night it is cold!

Brown Mother, Earth Mother, the swell of your
bosom, the scent of your hair,
They are life, they are death, two in one to your child,
Like the flame of your blossom, the sweep of your wild,
Or the primal red mud of life's sowing.

Earth Mother, brown Mother, dear Mother, will the
long night be run? . . .
Touch the root to its milk, do you say? Send the sap
to the bud,
Feel the five-fingered leaf on my bosom, the grass on
my lip?
Find my bed in the wild? Bear the rose and the lily
for child? . . .

O, my Mother, Earth Mother, reach me round with
your loving,
Fold me in to your heart, base me deep on your breast
for this sleep!

Then, Mother, sweet Mother, with the clay and the spring I shall wake,
Turn my back to the East with its frost and its manacled trees,
Turn my face to the West and the blaze of my lover the Sun!

SEA GULLS

On Leaving Eggemoggin

Sea gulls I saw lifting the dawn with rosy feet,
Bearing the sunlight on their wings,
Dripping the dusk from burnished plumes;
And I thought
It would be joy to be a sea gull
At dusk, at dawn of day,
And through long sunlit hours.

Sea gulls I saw carrying the night upon their backs,
Wide tail spread crescent for the moon and stars—
The moon a glowing jelly fish,
The stars foam flecks of light;
And I thought
It would be joy to be a sea gull!

How I would dart with them,
Strike storm with coral spur,
Rip whirling spray of angry tides,
Snatch mangled, light-shot offal of the sea,—
Torn, tossed and moving terribly;
And stare for stare answer those myriad eyes
That float and sway, stab, sting and die away!

How I would peer from wide cold eyes of fire
At dusk, at dawn
And through the long daylight
Into those coiling depths of sea;
Then split the sun, the moon, the stars,
With laughter, laughter, laughter,
For the sea's mad power!

DRAGON

Some saw a dragon eating up the light,
Oho! Oho! Oho, ho, ho!
Some heard a lost bird riding out the night,
Oho! Oho! Oho, ho, ho!

But I saw:
A low dark hill with its twisted back,
Two wings of flame from the green cloud rack,
A sprawling flank overlaid with leaf
Glitter and gleam and shine like steel,
Crackle and lash like a serpent's tail!

And I heard:
The wind draw out of the west and wail,
Dance and stagger and jig and reel
With the long low sound of a life in grief!

I saw a life in grief
Oho! Oho! Oho, ho, ho!
Dance and stagger and jig and reel!
Oho! Oho! Oho, ho, ho!

THE WANDERER

Hear the illimitable wind
Rush from a desolate sea of space
Into the valley's folded gloom,
And smite the branches gibbeted
On frosty trees, and lash the woods
To moans of age-old agony!

Hark! how it leaps upon the roofs
Of cottages, to drop whimpering
Like some old dog before the door of home;
Or pipes through chink and sill, a witless thing.

It is the only houseless one,
A pensioner of sea and cloud,
An outcast in a universe
Of night and day, of life and death,
An alien, frenzied wanderer,—
Homeless, illimitable wind!

BLIND SLEEP

In dreams have come to stay
Earth's golden bonnet of the day,
Her gay attire,
The dove wings gray she wore at dawn,
The ivory of her cradled breast,
Her dusk of plumèd fire,
And all her garments of delight.

Heavily I grope
Step after step,
Afar,
About this star-illumined sod,
Silver with all the slumber of the world,
Jewelled with every gem of light,
Splintered with frosty air,—
And know blind sleep.

THE BOWL

God said, "For you this bowl is life!
Draw near and look!
Therein is the bright water of dawn,
Night's silver covering of rain!
Therein is dream lying like day,—
Topaz with sun upon it!
Lithe out of this bowl
Shall leap the larch in spring,
For this is love,—
Green flame of flight to the very tip!"

I looked into the bowl, wondering:
And night and dawn mingled
And sleep stirred
And the day turned in its dream,
And flame, flickering, swept the bowl's lip.
Then I took the bowl in my two hands,
Thanking God.

But now in my bowl dawn breaks no more,
Over the bowl's lip I hear the iron shudder of dry leaves
Beaten by frozen wind.
There is no rain to soften sleep,
No day like topaz in the sun,
I see the larch crumble to ash,—
My arms grow numb back to the very heart
Holding this bowl God gave to me!

THE GREAT SILENCE

I

Magnificent, my Own,
Across the City's crash of sound,
Above the marching of her war-shod feet,
I hear you call, "I am alone,—alone!"
In that full, tragic voice of yours repeat,
Echo and tone,
"Alone,—I am alone!"

II

Oh, Splendid One,
The stars still hang the City's night
With peace and light!
What wars could ever bind
The singing of God's universe in space?
You turn your eyes,
Burning, ancient, wise,
And speak, "All have I seen,
Evil and good,
All man has been,
All man has done,—
And I am blind."
But God, I cried . . .
Then came your moan,
Like Pontius Pilate overthrown,
"God I have denied!"

III

Magnificent, my Own,
There beyond the City's sky
Are pinnacle and dream,
The rushing of a mighty stream,
The night-wind's cry
And thunder-harp of pine.
"Oh, Christ," you weep,
"They are not mine,
They are not mine!
I cannot see, I cannot hear,
Only I remember year on year
Abel and Cain.
Yet somewhere in this welter of my pain
I keep
Memory of another,—
Those two lost syllables of doom."
"What syllables are they, my Own?"
"That word is 'Brother'!"

WHITE HAIR

All the warmth has gone out of white hair,
It only answers to the wind
And lifts and stirs like creeping snow
Close to the frozen scalp of earth.
It has no gold of autumn grasses
Or red of beech buds
Or warm brown of tree bark
Or depths of quiet
In which eyes burn like star-flame in a dark night.

Has death white hair
And the cramped empty shoulders of old age?
If he has, I shall be as a child, frightened and trying
to hide from him.
But if his touch is the touch of warm rain,
If his breath is sweet like the gray-green fruit of the
juniper,
If his shoulder is deep and strong like the up-heaved
root of hemlock
And his hair velvet-dusk as a moth's wing,
Then I shall go to him gladly,
And sleep well . . .

What is this bitterness of love that scatters dust in the eyes?
What this absence that shrivels the heart and the blood?
What these cries that stop the ears with their pain?
Let us take our love unto God,
He understands, He has fashioned us and is kind;
How well He knows that love must carry its burden
If it would run to bathe in clear pools and lift its eyes to the stars!

What are we that we should not know that we are His,
And of Him our passion and of Him our tears?
His breast is deep and He will fold us there
In the mystery of His dark, in the miracle of His closeness.
Distance from us knows He not nor space,
And our love which is His how can it be divided from itself?
Are we not one even as we are His?

What is that cry?
Is it sorrow or is it the wind upon the waters?
What is this light that flows like a brook?
How well He knows that love must carry its burden,
If it would run to bathe in clear pools and lift its eyes to the stars!

THESE TWO

Sometimes when I am alone at night
I put my hand upon my heart;
But it matters little to me that these two are one
From the deep inflow of the rushing blood
Even to the extremity of each living finger
Swung from hollowed palm and flexible wrist:—
This heart and hand that are so wonderful,
So joined in life; so fashioned
In the beat of pulse
And passionate discernment of touch for joy,
So separate and yet not to be divided.

It is not of them I am thinking
When I place my hand on my heart
In the lonely night.
In its weight
Again I feel your head lying on my breast
And in its touch the oval of your childlike face.
You are wide-eyed once more,
With those gray eyes of the sea
Full of space and the shadows of birds' wings
And the terror of known depths of human tragedy;
You are wide-eyed now
Looking into the dark with me,
Wondering about the night.

I cannot believe that it is only my own hand upon my
heart
And that we are separated;

I cannot understand the use of my own fingers
Or the beating of my own pulse;
And I take my hand away
And lie alone in the dark
And suffer.

THE RAILROAD STATION

A station is a place of miracle:
So many trains passing and repassing,
So many thoughts coming and going,
So many greetings and farewells!
Any surprise might happen there:
God come and go,
Street cries turn to stars,
Dust of blown rubbish whirl to aureole!
Thus, in such a place,
Love met me once.
That day the shining tracks seemed leaping toward
eternity,
And we heard the street cries sing like stars,
And we saw God come and go
And the dust upon our hair was gold!
Now, blinded, I look past all I see:
It might happen,
Love might be there again!
It's not that I think a railroad station heaven.
Who does!
Yet so many greetings and farewells,—
Anything might happen!
Have you not felt that way,
And, bewildered, watched;
And, longing, waited?

BUBBLES

How shall I link my thought to yours
Through hours that whirl to dust!
Fling me some word will keep me close to you,
If but a rainbow bubble like our breath,
And share with me its swift-revolving dream!

See how the bubble shapes the silver moon, the golden
sun!
In purple sleep it spins among the stars,
Or crimson film it holds the dawn,
Only to break in shattered mist upon our lips,—
One azure word turned kiss!

PEDDLED JOY

"May I not sell this gewgaw red?"
"You must not sell!
You cannot buy!"
"Not sell my own, my heart?"
"You two are one: you may not part,—
One peddled joy, you both are dead!"

"Must I go hungry all the way?"
"You must not beg!
You must not cry!"
"Not for two bits o'love today?"
"Your empty scrip for pillow keep:
It brings great gifts,—thirst, sorrow, sleep!"

WORK

I told my heart that work must be
The only aim of life for me.
But oh! my heart cried, "Love, love, love!"
And wept bitterly.

SOMEWHERE TONIGHT

On hearing the Evening Bells at Westport-on-Lake Champlain

I

Somewhere I have heard bells
Mellow as the moon:
Somewhere they hung and swung,
With slender sound they rose
Tiptoe with hunger for the sky,
Star-pointed with the light of dream;
Somewhere those eager bells whispered of love,—
That was another day,
And we were gay!

II

And now this withered sound's farewell
Swinging like tethered rhyme,
Slow-moving, pendulous,
A sigh upon the water's breast,
A cloud within the sky!
Never again for us, Belovèd,
Yet somewhere the moon shines and is bright,—
Somewhere tonight!

YOUR SUNLIT WAY

I

Should one thought cry against me in your heart,
I could not rise from Death, saying, "Love, my place
Is by your living side; ghostly, I touch
Your precious hands, I kiss your lovely face!"

II

I would not have you shrink to feel me near,
Or claim despite your will what once was mine,
Was ours in God-flung vow, passionate, dear
By night, by day, companioned or apart.

III

Not mine to snare your liberty, to cage
Your sunlit way. Yet, wish me gone, I leap
From light, I plunge to find amen and shroud
In Death,—this time for Love's eternal sleep.

There!
That is the face for me—
That face I shall never see
In this world again!
All that I miss is there,
Touch of life and its kiss!
O, mysterious love in our heart
Found for us both as we pass,—
As we part!

EVERYWHERE

You I love,
You and you:
One I never see
And one I know.

Well, and what then?
Nothing.
But, I ask,
Does the wind blow?
Do feet drift or go?
And where?
How shall a tinker mend
A pinch of dust?

Some things are mine to keep,
Some to share:
My thoughts I bear
Because I must;
My love I spend
Because I wish,
On you I never see,
On you I know,—
Everywhere.

CLOUD

A slate galleon hurrying across a sea of fire,—
And they call *that* "cloud"!
And the sea it sails upon "sky"!
Tut, it is a ship as plain as anything
Full-spread to find the silver edges of the world
Where ships and island daffodils
Burn, follow sun, dip,
Cling to the shining brim like flapping butterflies,
Let go,
Then, whirling sail and streaming daffodil,
Dart into night and flame to stars!
And the "sky" . . .
Now you tell what the sky is!

BUCENTAUR

At Isle au Haut

Dawn, bright dawn,
White swan on the edge of the dark pool of night
Fan the shade from its mirror,
Cleave the stars on its deep!

Joyous barge of my dream,
On the wave, on the wind, O Bucentaur,
With your cry sweep the seas,
Shake the wind from the trees,
Wake the world from its sleep,
Meet and greet
Song within song!

Your eyes jewelled fire,
Your touch my desire,
Draw nearer, draw nearer
Down the rose-colored stream;
White swan, bright dawn,
Kiss me, and lift me
On the wing of your light!

MOTH

At Isle au Haut

Gray as a moth the light of day
Dawns in the east,
Dimming the star that crowns the hill,
Stilling the wind,
Hushing the deep
Of the water's sleep;

Flits like a moth's pearl wing in the night
To the peak of mast
And the spire of tree,
Touches the nest and its thrush to song,
Flutters the edge of the sky along.

Gray like a moth
Dawn slips away,
Bright in apocalypse of light.
Rose and gold and green of the world,
Wind and bird and the great sea's lay
Possess the day!

GRAY WATERS

At Isle au Haut

Take me to some isle upon the sea!
Bear me on wing of bird or keel of ship
Out where gray waters slip
About some isle upon the sea,—
    Upon the sea!

Lay me within some caverned rock
Whose bosom, hard from all the years,
Knows nothing of men's tears,—
Gray peaceful rest beside the sea,
    Beside the sea!

Take me to some isle upon the sea!
Bear me on wing of bird or keel of ship
Out where gray waters slip
About some isle upon the sea!
    Upon the sea!

JOURNEY'S END

I shall not hear the thrushes sing,
  Though sing they will that day;
For me will be an unknown sod
  And an undreamed-of May!

WHITE PATHS

Here are white paths that gleam
In the twilight space of dream;
Here the winds turn in their sleep
With the rocking of the deep;
Here the golden song of thrush
Is music's sunlight, evening's hush;
Here the rustle of our prayer
Climbs the forest altar stair;
And here the stars burn in the sod—
Peaceful candlelight for God.

EBONY

On watching a beautiful black arm opening a Venetian Lantern at Fleur de Lys

Ebony, Ebony,
Dreaming of a rose,
Flame in the flower-heart,
Dusk in repose;

Jeweled eyes glistening,
Dew on the leaf,
Sweet to Africa
Is the thought of her grief.

TO SOME PHILADELPHIA SPARROWS

Men say unfriendly words of you, poor birds!
And I? I praise you for your saucy joy
On dusty streets; I love you for your twitter
In vines that cling to heated city walls;
Your noisy congregations on the trees;
Unchurchly ways of saying this and that
About your brother men; your gaieties
In parks nearby a fountain's dripping brim.

Men say your manners are not fine. And, too,
They call you scavengers, they call you thief
And enemy to other prettier birds.
Perhaps we are one feather, you and I!
I would not hold it any grief to be
Your brother bird upon the city street.

I love you, chatterers! Yet I have heard
The lark in other lands, the thrush in this.
Dull many a day had been without your din,
Your wrangles under foot, your shameless ways.

Men say unfriendly words of you. Of me
They speak unkindly, too. Yet see how gay
We are! Ah, well, we are one feather, you
And I! We have the city streets for plunder,
The eaves for wonder, and above there is
The sky!

ORIOLE'S NEST

AT FLEUR DE LYS

Night in an oriole's hanging nest
Is rocking a basket world to sleep.
The wind blows soft
And the wind blows far,
Star, creep, star!

Pack me tight in my basket world,
Tread me and turn me with feet of your love!
O, Mother Bird, fledge me with feather and rest!
O, Mother Bird, brood me with flame of your breast!
Down in the marshes the little fish gleam,
Down in the marshes the little fish stir
Rushes in sleep,
Rushes that keep
Wrinkling the light of a drowsy star.

Here in my basket world hung on the wind
Over me rustles an ebony bough,
Over me hovers a silvery beak;
And clear and soft
And near and far
Lustre of loving eyes rocked in this nest,
Eyes that are gentle,
Eyes that are meek.
O, Mother Bird, fledge me with feather and rest!
O, Mother Bird, brood me with flame of your breast!

LITTLE MISS HILLY

Oh, little Miss Hilly of Northampton-town
Goes walking the valleys and meadows adown;
She looks in the brooks for the stars and the moon
And she sings an old chanty a bit out of tune.
  Oh, little Miss Hilly is dear unto me,—
    Is dear unto me!

Her arms are so eager but tiny are they,
And her fingers are agile as waters at play.
Yet little Miss Hilly must climb a steep slope,
Must go without laughter and live without hope:
Must chatter and patter like leaves and like rain,
Must shiver and quiver and ache with the pain
Of climbing for stars and wanting the moon
As she puts an old chanty once more into tune,
Ere the stars will come down or the moon will reply
Except by a wink through a chink in the sky
  Oh, little Miss Hilly so dear unto me,
    So dear unto me!

ROSE TOADA

A Sleep Song

I

Shoo, Rose Toada, Shoo!
Jewelled red eyes for you.
Shoo, Rose Toada, Shoo!

II

Hoosh, Rose Toada, hoosh!
Little green snake in the bush.
Hoosh, Rose Toada, hoosh!

III

Bizz, Rose Toada, buzz!
Gold on its wings and fuzz.
Bizz, Rose Toada, buzz!

THATCH

Oh Boy, give me your yellow thatch for home,
Your yellow thatch of hair,
Straw with the wind and air!

Oh Boy, give me your stubble cheek to roam,
Brown hayfield in the dew,—
Rusty with sun and you!

SUN-PATH

I

How should I touch your years with mine,
Yours flushed with dawn, a flight
For all ecstacy of light, of rose, of flame,
Mine shadowed even now by night!
Yet, child, blown by the dawn-wind of your name,
Tossed by the sunlight in your eyes,
Sped by the glow upon your lips, you came,
Seeking my shadow and my rest.

II

Tell me what made you run to me?
Was it the long, unsheltered way from dawn to dusk,
The hot, unclouded, copper day of truth,
Was it some legend of men's tears and strife,
Some tale of cowards prospering in the sun,
Some sin red-flung across the lilies that men love?
Or terror which the old forget, fears
Following as you fled, some shame
Of fact too awful for your youth to bear?

III

Back to your sun-path now you run
And on with wing of bird and flight of sun.
Your youth upon its golden way
Forgets it ever asked for rest,
Forgets my desolated day.
To me you left your tears,
Your fears a-tremble,
And hunger in mine eyes for you.
And I? I leave you free.

RAVELLO

A Recollection of the Garden in which Wagner composed "Parzival"

Words glimmering like candles in the dusk
You tell your golden tale of Italy,—
Ravello and its starlit, tranquil sea
Among massed trees sleep-hung with jewelled fruit;
Antiquity against a shadowed sky,
And everywhere old gardens where men loved
So long ago, and the moon rose on vows
And thirsty human lips aching to meet;
And the moon set on darkling ivory-petalled rows
Of lilies and on hands dim with loneliness:—
  Below, Amalfi's campanile plays
  Its even-song, full chant and antiphon,
  A wish, a hope, a call from star to star.

O, Compassionate One, night-long with you I hark
The travelling of that music lost in space,
The echoing of those faithful feet of men,
And touch the blurred chalcedony of tears,
And breathe those candle-lighted thoughts, faint musk
Of old days vanished in silence now!
Night-long I dream your face pressed close to mine
Is lily of Ravello in its sleep,
Touched with some ancient sorrow gardens keep,—
An ivory-petalled dream whose ghostly passions shine
Like fingers in the dark struggling with fears:—
  O, set your love for me, my Own, my Sweet,
  The whiteness of your breast and brow aglow
  With God, like candleshine before my feet!

CHESTER-ON-THE DEE

Sleep, little town, your moonlit walls
Are hushed with long-ago!
Night, like your river, brings to you
Forgetfulness of woe.

Peace, little town! Grave sleep is this
That aches in love and tears,
With singing stream, with shining dream,
With sense of other years.

THE RIVER SEIONT

At Carnarvon in North Wales

Where the salt sea winds her sleeping path
Up the River Seiont in summer time,
And daisies flush the aftermath
Of stubble corn; and heavy cows
Wait by the water's edge,
While cloud-capped Snowdon hills grow dim,
And fading Anglesey a crystal rim,—
Then
Your spirit comes,
A tidal sea,
Winding,
Up the River Seiont,
Past the purple hill;
Winding,
Past the Castle wall,
Winding;—
Then
Your spirit comes,
Winding,
Up the River Seiont
To me.

They lie beside me all the night,
They crowd up close to me;
And when I turn, they turn;
And when I sigh, they cry.
Says one: "I am the love you sought
Now wrinkled to an afterthought."
The other whispers in my ear:
"You coveted:
Behold, I lie here dead!"
These are the gifts sleep brings to me,—
My dreams of gold and ivory!

STEPS

I

There is a stair to climb
That—Christ you keep!—
Men stumble there
It is so steep.

II

Its steps give scarce foothold,
Yet, pilgrim-shod,
Hungry, athirst,
Men climb to God.

BESIDE THE WAY

I

O, little wind of every day,
O, little wind of hope,
  Bring to me love
  Beside the way,
O, little wind of every day!

II

There's vexing work for scanty keep,
With tears for daily drink,
  And but this cup
  To bring me sleep,
This cup of golden love dream-deep.

III

O, little wind of every day,
O, little wind of hope,
  Bring to me love
  Beside the way,
O, little wind of every day!

WAIT AWHILE

I

If you would know my mother-heart,
Then wait awhile, be still;
Watch for the settling dusky light,
The silence, on the hill;
And wait awhile, be still.

II

Love, heed the clap of little hands,
Of leaves upon my trees;
And hear the travelling of the wind,
The moving of the seas;
Then wait awhile, be still.

III

If you would know my mother-heart,
But watch the wasting day!
The wind steps softly in the corn,
The light slips to the hill;
Love, wait awhile, be still.

INDIAN SUMMER

Blossoms shaken from their star forms
Back to earth,
Flying seedlings warm and waiting
Drift in sunlight with the going
Of the birds towards the south!

Birds are going!
They will sing before they go,
Fill the orchard with their mirth:
Song of harvest, song of summer, song of spring-time,—
They remember it was April long ago!

We are parting,
You are going towards the south!
Love was birth.
Is this dying,—
Death my harvest, grief my summer, tears my spring-time? . . .
Well, kiss me kindly,
Song is warmest on the mouth!
Give me love before you go!

A THOUSAND YEARS

A thousand years from now
No one will know that you and I
Lifted our arms to touch the sky
And clasped an empty vow,—
No one will know,
We loved so long ago!

A thousand years from now
We shall not hear the cry of hope
Linger, remember, echo, grope,
While mornings glow
And evenings come and go!

A thousand years from now
No one will know that we have slept
Breast to each other's breast and wept,—
No one will know
We loved so long ago!

A thousand years from now
We shall not see love welcome death,
Dreams harden into frosted breath,
Spring burn the apple bough
While mornings glow
And evenings come and go!

THE BROKEN DOOR

This is the place! I know
The broken door, the ragged bed of bloom
Where poppies grow,
Row after row.

This is the place.
A year ago, her footprint
Marked the garden path
With tender hollow.

But now?
Time's step is slow to follow.

ONLY YOUR NAME

Sometimes I wake from sleep
Only your name drawing across my lips
In creeping wind from unlit space,
No star sparks flickering on that wind,
No signal tree top touched with racing light,
No lantern-memory hung to show the way;
Only a pathless name,
Dark, terrible, meaningless because most near!
And yet I never knew you,—
Only your name and pain!

REPETENDS

In the still woods I find your eyes,
I hear your voice once more
And the far-singing hermit thrush
Beyond our northern door.

In the still woods pale repetends
I find of death and grief
In fallen nest and perished bee
And sepulchre of leaf.

TOO LATE

It is too long, too long!
My heart grows old with grieving
For the touch of you.

It is too far, too far!
My eyes are dazed
With searching emptiness,—
The dark, the blurred horizon
With its dust of other feet.

It is too late, too late!
Gray thoughts stalk round me
With their death.
I strike my tent,
I go.
Not even dreams can bring you now,—
Too long, too far, too late!

THE TIDE

I shall find you when the tide comes in,—
A shell, a sound, a flash of light
To live with me by day,
To dream with me by night.

You come and go
As waters flow;
You lap me round
You pour me full;
A shell at rest
You touch my breast.
I feel your will,
And I am bound
By light, by sound;
To love you still.

I shall find you when the tide comes in,—
A shell, a sound, a flash of light.
Men say you died.
They knew not what to say,—
I hear the tide,
I hear the tide!

At peace with every sweet remembered thing
You lie; with woodland song that died long years
Ago; with pebbles washed ashore and fears
Released and feathers broken from the wing
That beat its westward flight towards the sun
And some far nest beside some unknown sea:
I would not answer when you called to me,
And now my thought of you is never done.

This starlit road with its dark towering pines,
Its dust of misty pollen blown in cloud
From field to field, its silences, its shroud
Of clinging dark and all its trailing vines
White with moonshine and the priestly dew,
We shared. Tonight I travel it alone,—
Alone I go towards that glistening stone
Which marks your rest, my thought a prayer for you.

Singing the water rushes past your quiet grave
Beneath this little town whose ancient name
Suggests the fair collegiate dream and fame
Of Oxford and her clustered towers. With wave
The river winds a garland for your rest—
The woven sound of grieving without end.
To you I bring the memory of a friend
And lay these words on your remembered breast.

THE NEST

I

Oh, is there room at your feet, dear one?
  And is there room at your side?
And can you hear the sound of my breath
  And sorrow that cries like a tide?

II

Oh, may I take your hand, dear one,
  As the nest enfolds the bird,
Lie close to your heart and breast to breast
  And never a spoken word?

III

What then if the stars be gone, dear one,
  What then if the wind be still,
And words that we spoke long years ago
  Drift pale and faint and chill?

IV

Our dust shall be warmed by the sun, dear one,
  Our grief shall fade with the snow;
And mingled in spring by sun and rain
  Our love to a flower blow.

V

Oh, is there room at your feet, dear one?
  And is there room at your side?
And can you hear the sound of my breath
  And sorrow that cries like a tide?

LOST LOVE

You have her mouth of grief,—
Your parted lips half-shape a moan;
You have her brow branded with memory;
You have her downcast eyes
Brooding like doves above the body's need;
You have her heart of love
Where music flows
And sorrows nurse.

O Voice of all lost love and agony,
Cecilia, Saint,
We beg the healing of your breast,
Music at our lips
And sleep!

"WHEN SPRING"

A BALLAD OF LOVE

I

When spring was in her heart beat,
  Her lover came from sea;
She gave him passion's lily cup,
  He gave her thistles three.

II

When spring was in her heart beat,
  He filled their lily cup
With bitter dew and star dust
  And frozen spray to sup.

III

When spring was in her heart beat,
  He snared the only star
Still racing on her dream path:
  Now other thistles are!

IV

He said a little tinsel
  Would serve her last journee,
And nailed a glittering handful
  Upon a willow tree.

V

Now death drags at her heart beat
  She sees gray branches weep;
They drip but ashen starlight,
  Singing, "Sleep! Sleep! Sleep!"

TWO CANDLES

TO MY MOTHER AT FLEUR DE LYS

I

Two candles place I at her feet,
  Two candles at her head;
These are the gifts that I would bring
  To my Belovèd Dead.

II

I sought the violet of her eyes,
  Her eyes were closed in sleep;
My love was trembling like a child
  And could not even weep.

III

I clad her in a purple shroud,
  Some said it should be white;
I said, "The passion of her eyes
  Found peace in candlelight!"

IV

Sometimes I see her ash-gold hair
  Shimmer within the night;
Sometimes I feel her violet eyes
  Searching for candlelight.

V

Sometimes I hear her drifting feet
  That seek from door to door,
Guided by star and blowing wind,
  Dream-shod forevermore.

VI

When will she come again to me
  Led by the wind and star?
She need not even call my name,
  I could not wander far.

VII

Two candles place I at her feet,
  Two candles at her head:
Remembrance and Oblivion
  Enfold my lonely dead.

ROSY MILLER

I do not ever remember having seen Rosy Miller;
I never met her;
Yet lose her I never can.
One night at dusk she came down a hill with me,
And the stars glowed
And all the college buildings were laced with window lights,
And beyond them were the dark hills.

It was the speech of a friend that made her live for me—
She was living then—,
Rosy Miller, who gave and gave,
Who, a child still, had learned the whole meaning of life,
Who asked nothing,
Who never held a hand out mendicant to others.

That was three years ago, that hour at dusk,
And now they say she is dead.
But that is a mistake:
Even for me who never knew her she still lives.

HIS NAME

He loved men with a great soul's deepest love;
He saw in them truth, hope, the very flame
Of constancy. And then alone
He died. Men have forgot his name.

MIST

I

I climb them step by step,—
The vanished years.
Stumbling I pause to look below,
Down wells of time, so black, so deep
Their waters keep
No sound,
Nor show a star,
Nor hold a memory.

II

Sometimes I kneel and look above
That dark stairway
At years to come;
My fingers clasp my fears,
Where my hopes go.
Up there, beyond that last, gray step,
Afar,
Within that roof of mist,
What is that shape in flight
Dim, strong and slow?

III

"A wing," some say;
Some answer, "Love";
And some say, "Night
And Sleep."
But I?
I do not know.

LAST DAWN

When that last dawn comes, what will it be?—
A plume of fire on a cloud of gray;
A shrouded ship in a cocoon sea;
A mountain peak with its one gold star;
A bird's nest swung by a silver wind;
Or the curve of an arm with its cradled child?
What will that last dawn be?

And God, what will God be?
The plume of fire or the mist-spun ship,
The mountain peak with its signal star,
The nest blown wide for the coming day,
Or the child in the human passionate arms? . . .
I wonder what God will be
And who shall see!

EVEN AS HERE

This is the end to which I come,—
I who have loved beauty all my days:
This grief of tortured flowers,
This prison box devised by men,
These nails and hasps and graven plates,
This narrow room, these curious eyes,
This tolling bell,
These mumbled words miscalled of God,
This brutal stone!

O, rather, Love,
Lay me on sweet-burning cedar,
Free, fragrant with beaded pitch where the clean axe cut,
With flame that leaps from singing heart of wood to mine!
Then cast me as ash upon the quilted colors of the autumn hills,
And I shall be pale lace of wind
To kiss your lips, your eyes once more!

Or strew me on water
Till I know again its slipping hands of dream,
And see its golden deep of sand shadowed with memories,
And feel its cradling touch soft as your moving breast
In closeness beyond the reach of words!

Or toss me as a feather
To some little shepherd moon and flock of stars
Where, in the slow-rolling of prodigious hours
Round the blown crust of other worlds,
Space beyond space,
I shall find you,—even as here!

AGAIN?

To my Home on Lake Champlain

Shall I come again?
Again to see the reeds,
Yellowing now?

"Bye and bye!
Bye and bye!"
Lake rushes cry.

Shall I come again
To these willow leaves
Falling now?

Their joy was brief!
The willow leaf
Knows grief.

Shall I breathe again
Gray balsam dripping amber
On the mould?

What knows the year
Of any fear,—
Of any amber tear!

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